United Nations ECE/CES/2014/33

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 March 2014

English only

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Sixty-second plenary session
Paris, 9-11 April 2014
Item 3 of the provisional agenda
What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?

Use of modern communication tools for promoting the value of European statistics

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Summary

The paper discusses recent actions to demonstrate the value of official statistics in Europe. It discusses means for that, including cooperation with data redistributors, use of visualisation tools and improving the presence of official statistics in society through new technology, such as mobile devices.

Different ways to use modern communication tools to promote the value of European statistics are also introduced, including redesign of websites, development of a user support network, improvement of the content and presentation of statistics in publications, developing tailored services for journalists, etc. A continuous adaptation of communication strategies to new technologies is one of the pre-conditions for ensuring that users realise the value of official statistics.

The paper is presented for discussion to the Conference of European Statisticians seminar on "What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?"

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I. Introduction

1. Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, compiles statistical data that are, for the most part, collected by Member States. It adds value by providing statistics at European level that enable comparisons between countries and regions, and by disseminating these data, free of charge, in consolidated format, via publications and on-line data bases.

2. Since 2004 free access to and re-use of data are cornerstones of Eurostat's dissemination policy. Promoting the widest possible use of Eurostat's statistics aims to establish official European statistics as the preferred source of information on the European Union.

3. As a general principle, and with few exceptions, Eurostat's statistics can be downloaded from the Eurostat's website and be re-used for any purpose, including commercial purposes, as long as Eurostat is mentioned as the data source. There are no charges for using Eurostat's statistics, and organizations that are re-using data are not required to sign any license agreements.

4. In our societies the value of a good or a service is very often linked to its price. However, this does not mean that goods that are free of charge, such as European statistics have no value. The value of Eurostat's statistics lies in their usefulness, their comparability, their quality and these elements have to be properly communicated to the stakeholders.

5. Since 2005, Eurostat has developed an integrated strategy of communication based on three objectives:

- To be the first source of information for European statistics;
- To increase the level of service to users;
- To present Eurostat figures in a more attractive way and, as far as possible, accompany them with clear and objective comments.

6. To reach these goals, many actions have been implemented by Eurostat which all aim to demonstrate the value of European statistics: regular redesign of Eurostat's website, development of a European user support network, improvement of the content and the presentation of Eurostat's publications, developing specific services for journalists, etc.

7. This paper presents recent actions that Eurostat has launched to demonstrate the value of official statistics using modern communication tools. The paper discusses cooperation with data redistributors and with Google in particular. It introduces Eurostat's work in the field of visualisation tools and considers how to ensure presence of official statistics on one of the most important today's communication tool: the mobile devices.

II. Cooperate with important and well-known organisations

8. Promotional activities are needed for effectively communicating the value of statistics. However, it can be even more convincing if the promotion is indirectly done by other, well-known organisations.

9. In order to increase the awareness of different target user groups on statistical information, Eurostat undertook cooperation with the open data community and other data redistributors and in particular with Google. Google mentioned for the first time Eurostat as the reference in the Government Summit 2.0 in Washington DC in September 2009. As of March 2012 several datasets based on Eurostat data (on inflation, public finances,

unemployment, etc.) can be accessed using the Google Public Data explorer and could be easily found on Google search in 34 languages.

10. The re-use of Eurostat data has been encouraged in the web community and several examples (on European Commission's Open Data Portal or on the Portuguese public data portal, on the site of The Guardian or of the French magazine Capital) of re-use of Eurostat data can be found on the web.

III. Change the dissemination chain to ease access to data

11. In early 2010, Eurostat has made a huge effort to improve its dissemination chain and to increase its visibility. It started with the bulk download facility and different web services for allowing anyone to set up procedure to automate the download of the required datasets.

12. Although this New Dissemination Chain was operational, it has become evident in 2011 that the increased visibility of European statistics, the ever-growing use of European statistics and indicators in policy decisions require rapid new enhancements of this chain and a huge effort in visualisation tools. Two new visualisation tools have then been made available for users: widgets and dashboards.

13. The Eurostat widget is a web application which shows a small amount of Eurostat data in a simple way and can be embedded into any website. The widgets were developed to follow up a recommendation from the Sponsorship on Communication to make European statistics visible on the websites of national statistical offices, but they can be used by anyone in using the widget template generator available on the website.

14. Eurostat currently supports a list of 17 indicators. The widgets always receive automatically the latest data for the selected indicator and do not require any specific update.

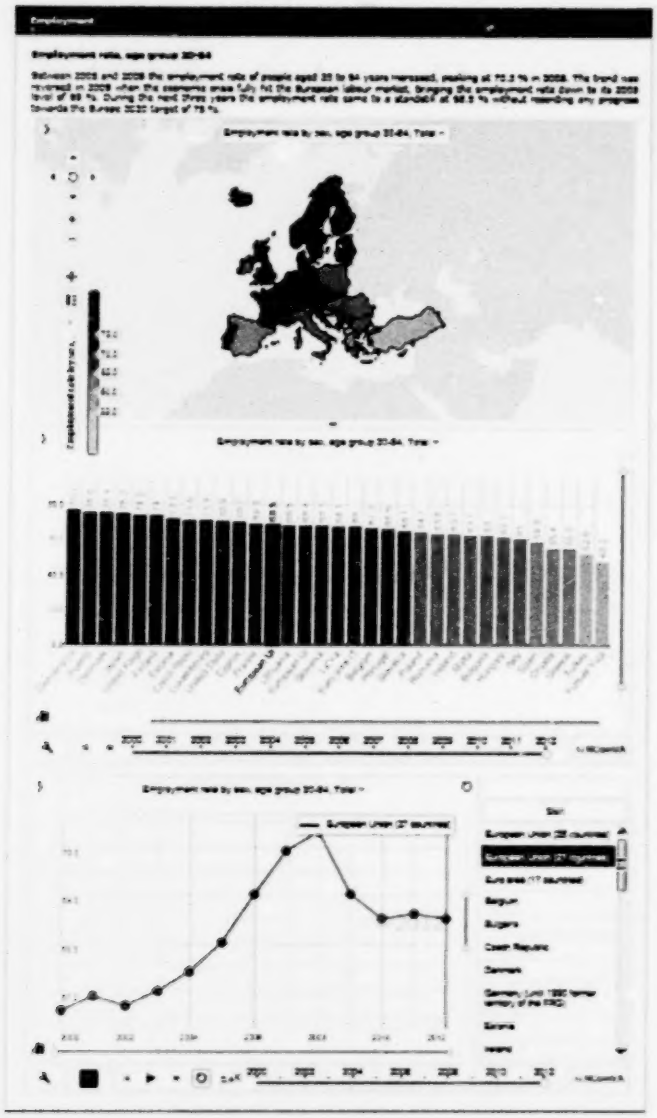
Figure 1

15. Eurostat develops flexible dashboards which aim at presenting indicators and statistical data to a broad audience on the Eurostat website, in a simple and easy to understand way, simplifying the comparison of statistical figures between EU Member

States, and reducing time-to-delivery for the setup or the modification of dashboards for a broad range of policies.

16. Currently a few specific dashboards, based on NComVA software, are already available on the Eurostat website, such as the Europe 2020 dashboards.

Figure 2



IV. Do not wait for users to find you - be present where they are

17. Users on the web are going systematically to Google, Bing etc. for data. Every day the same users are browsing and playing on smartphones and tablets for leisure and/or professional purposes. As a consequence the market of mobile devices is strongly expanding since some years, and users expect that organisations such as Eurostat offer at least some dedicated information and functionalities for mobile devices. It is then expected that mobile applications (apps) will attract a growing number of users and are therefore increasingly important for Eurostat's image.

18. Eurostat has so far released two native apps (Country Profiles app for Apple and Android devices and EU economy for Apple) around the beginning of 2012 and end of 2013.

19. The Country Profiles app shows latest data for a set of about 160 key indicators. It also allows for displaying the data in form of dynamic graphs and maps for each indicator. Data can be downloaded either automatically or manually from the Eurostat web server, and the app can also be used without Internet connection (with downloaded data). The Apple version was downloaded around 11,000 times in total (December 2011 - December 2013), and a high percentage of users continue to update it when new versions are released (70%).

Figure 3

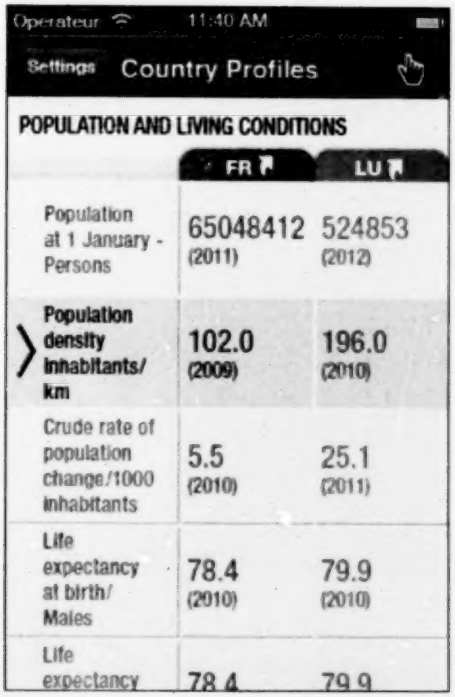


Figure 4

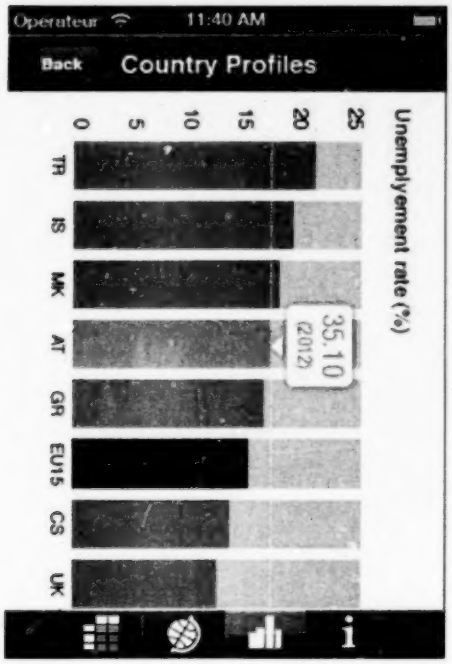
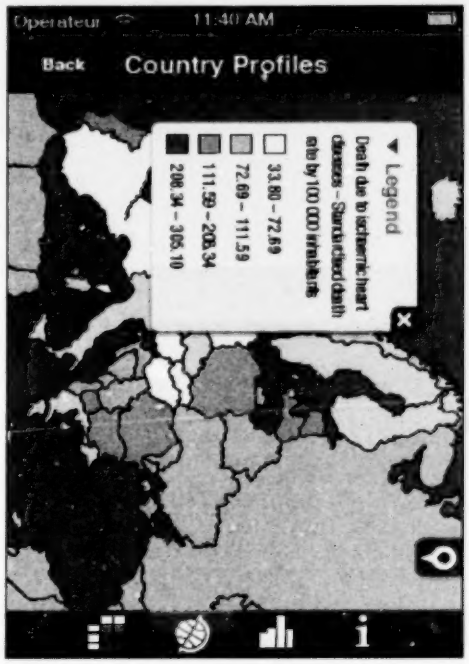


Figure 5



20. The EU Economy app gives mobile access to the most important short-term macroeconomic indicators (Principal European Economic Indicators-PEEIs) for the euro area, the EU and its Member States. The app is available in three languages: English, French and German. The update function allows to download the freshest data from the Eurostat database.

21. It includes separate screens for listing indicators by geographic entities (Member States etc.), indicators and euro indicator news releases, a screen for displaying individual user configurations as well as attractive graphs and other information. The latest press releases are also available. It is mainly designed for professionals who need a quick overview on the most recent economic information.

Figure 6

V. Conclusions

22. To allow identifying targeted users and to better communicate with them, Eurostat measures the traffic on its website as well as the impact of its statistical information on the English, French and German speaking web practically in real time.

23. Eurostat's website had in 2013 more than 3 million visitors per month (+19% compared with 2012). In 2013, Eurostat was mentioned nearly 100 000 times (also +19% compared to 2012) on the English, French and German speaking web, from 4500 different sources in the media, blogs, forum and social networks.

24. If more and more people are using or re-disseminating Eurostat data, it is surely because more and more people believe in the value of European statistics. All efforts made by Eurostat and also by the national statistical offices of Member States to promote European data and to communicate on their value have participated to these encouraging results. However, they will have a short and limited effect if efforts are not pursued. In a world where each citizen is flooded every day by an impressive number of information, it may be difficult to understand the value of "official statistics". A continuous adaptation of our communication strategy to new communication technologies and tools is a pre-condition for ensuring that our users are confident in our data and aware of their value.